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12. Conclusions: Future directions of multiliteracies scholarship and practice

Kristiina Kumpulainen and Julian Sefton-Green

In this book, we have considered the role of multiliteracies in the education of young children living and learning in contemporary societies in the global North. Drawing on both a moment in curriculum reform in Finland which in turn led to classroom innovation and research, and studies about multiliteracies education in Australia, the US, the UK and Norway, this contributes to at least three strands in educational reform and multiliteracy scholarship in the early years. First, the book explains and illustrates recent curriculum innovation and reform efforts situated in Finnish early childhood and primary education. Second, it pictures the changing literacies of young children's learning lives and demonstrates how these can be potentially enhanced through holistic, dynamic and transformative multiliteracy pedagogy both in Finland and beyond. Third, the book unpacks some of the challenges and opportunities for enhancing professional development opportunities of early years practitioners. Taken together, the chapters of this book not only contribute to recent scholarship on multiliteracies and its implications for early years curriculum and pedagogy, but also raise questions about the role and purpose of multiliteracies both in young children's lives and in the curriculum, inviting readers to reflect on and imagine futures for the politics of literacy, schooling and pedagogy in the early years in and across local and global contexts.

There are a number of important questions that we raised in our Introduction (Chapter 1) with regards to theory and practice of multiliteracies in the early years. In this conclusion, we respond to these challenges. We end this chapter with a call to action about the future directions of multiliteracies scholarship and practice.

How might new curriculum content and/or different pedagogies trouble existing practice?

One of the key messages of our book is that managing educational innovation and change is not a simple, quick or smooth process. Even in Finland where early years education is highly developed,

highly institutionalized and well financed, it is nevertheless, often resistant to reform. We outlined the nature of the challenges of educational reform in Chapter 1 that underscores: that for sustained change we need to take account of the whole system, classroom, teacher expertise, and learner experience dimensions of change. The chapter also pointed out the need for a joint language and understanding what multiliteracies mean in and for early years education as a starting point for reform and change. This is particularly important in Finland as the education system including its curriculum does not have a history of work in multiliteracies as it has been conceptualized in the new literacies tradition.

The chapters in this book also show how more established classroom practices interact and come into tension with new ways of teaching and learning multiliteracies. In Chapter 4, Jessica Zacher Pandya pointed out how U.S. teachers had to manage several tensions whilst introducing video-production as a new form of digital multiliteracies practice into their classrooms. These tensions brought to the fore contradictory notions of creativity and assessment at the intersection of novel multiliteracies practice and more established schooled practice with pressures for curricular standardization and large-scale, high-stakes testing.

Similarly, in Chapter 11, Michael Dezuanni asks whether formal education systems are willing to accept the value of learning multiliteracies on digital platforms through “peer pedagogies” during which knowledge construction and learning become distributed across children and their teachers, crossing and transforming traditional expert-novice boundaries. In those educational systems that are based on heavily teacher controlled and structured early years practice, accepting and accommodating such peer pedagogies requires careful attention towards configuration of new roles and relationships for both teachers and children.

In Chapter 3, Heidi Sairanen, Jonna Kangas and Sara Sintonen consider how teacher agency and the conditions for its emergence are important drivers of transforming classroom practice. In their work, they showed how Finnish early years teachers used and made sense of multiliteracies teaching and learning in local contexts. One of the key messages from their chapter is that teachers need to exercise their professional agency in order to find a balance between old and new ways of working. Their work also points out how navigating agency-structure dynamics in the context of educational reform requires constant effort and collective learning (see also Kumpulainen, Kajamaa & Rajala, 2018).

How can innovations be introduced at scale?

A new national curriculum mandate plays out differently in a country like Finland, with its tradition of local accountability and significant local and regional variation. How do innovations in theory and practice, like multiliteracies, work through a system like this? It is clear that an educational system like Finland where teachers are trusted as “designers” of their teaching, and are considered as important and accountable actors in implementing educational change, requires extensive investments in continuous teacher professional development nationally and locally (Kumpulainen, 2018). Moreover, there is a need to steer and cultivate innovation via co-participatory developmental research between early years practitioners, researchers and other relevant stakeholders. In a system like Finland, the fidelity of the new multiliteracies curriculum concentrates on underlying core principles, values and definitions. In early years centers, schools and their teachers are afforded flexibility in the day-to-day realisation of the multiliteracies curriculum thus taking account of local conditions and resources, including children’s needs and interests. These starting points and principles advocated by the Finnish education system to introduce innovations at scale are also strongly visible in MOI, *Monilukutaitoa Opitaan Ilolla* (The Joy of Learning Multiliteracies) research and development program funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. In the chapters about the implementation of MOI program (Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 10), we noted multiple ways in which multiliteracies were incorporated in pedagogical practices in early years classrooms, united by a common framework and set of principles (see also Kumpulainen, Sintonen, Vartiainen, Sairanen, Nordström, Byman, & Renlund, 2018).

Our book also points out how international collaboration between early years practitioners, researchers and children themselves can create fertile opportunities for learning and professional development, and, hence, contribute to the co-creation and introduction of innovations at scale. In Chapter 8, a collaboration between English and Finnish researchers and early years practitioners, Jackie Marsh, Alexandra Nordström, Heidi Sairanen, and Minna Shkul, discusses a cross-cultural project in which children in a primary school in England exchanged information and shared their maker work around Moomin stories with children in an early childhood education center in Helsinki. The chapter not only outlines the value of makerspaces for multiliteracy learning in the early years, but also demonstrates the value of international projects and researcher-practitioner collaboration.

How can teacher expertise in the area of multiliteracies be supported and developed?

Although the education system in Finland is renowned for highly trained educators and respect for teacher autonomy and independence, the field of multiliteracies and its introduction in the new curriculum is nevertheless challenging to many education professionals. Many practitioners in Finland also ask what new and different do multiliteracies bring into existing early years practice that is by its very nature child- and play-based and which regards children's multimodal, embodied inquiry and engagement as core components of children's holistic learning and development? In this context, one may also want to ask, what should teachers know about multiliteracies and their recognition in their everyday classroom practice?

In Chapter 2, Lisa Kervin and Barbara Comber make a case for teacher professional development in terms of positioning teachers as researchers of their own practice to support and develop their professional expertise. Kervin and Comber show how teacher inquiries and reflections on their practice in the context of designing and enacting a pedagogy of multiliteracies can disrupt typical roles, relationships and expectations about teaching and learning as teachers incorporate new and varied tools and materials, or use space in different ways to create new kinds of texts. The authors also point out how teacher research is important for teachers in evaluating and further developing their pedagogical practice to better meet children's needs and interests and to deal with complex classroom situations.

In the Finnish education system, the development of teacher professional expertise is regarded more than the learning of procedural skills and competences and includes an ontological aspect where identity and agency are emphasized (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011). The system holds that professional agency is a requirement for the development of teacher expertise, including being able to develop and implement novel educational practices that exceed the taken-for-granted and customary. Teachers thus take an active role in their professional learning, rather than the education system mandating them to do so. Here, teacher motivation and passion towards their work and their own learning (together with adequate offerings of professional learning opportunities) plays a central role in education in Finland. These values and goals that are also strongly present in this book particularly in Chapter 3 on teacher agency in the Finnish system.

How can standards be benchmarked and meaningful learning progressions be described in a more open and emerging conceptual field (referring to multiliteracies and early years)?

An important question that surrounds any educational innovation and intervention is what might constitute evidence of change in children's learning, understanding, and knowledge? This question is also very relevant in the context of conceptualizing and mapping young children's multiliteracies learning processes and outcomes. Approaching multiliteracies broadly - as a pedagogy, as a theory of cultural development, and as an educational project - the description and analysis of children's multiliteracies learning is approached from the perspective of sociocultural practice. Here, pedagogical practice and children's learning are approached as co-constructed, yet, contextually situated dynamic entities. This approach to understanding learning progressions resonate with the Finnish early years education that does not set any early learning performance requirements or outcome specifications for children's learning and development. Teachers are required to systematically observe and document how their pedagogical work fosters each child's learning; they are also required to factor these observations into planning future activities in each child's individual development plans. Notable in this process is that teachers also support children's own capabilities in evaluating their own learning and achievements in situ and over time (Kumpulainen, 2018).

The chapters of this book provide rich descriptions how multiliteracies standards be benchmarked and meaningful learning progressions mapped from a sociocultural practice perspective. For instance, in Chapter 5 Jenni Vartanen and Kristiina Kumpulainen draw on Green's (1988) three-dimensional model of literacy, and show how this model can help us understand children's multiliteracies engagement and learning opportunities in early science education. Their work makes visible how multiliteracies pedagogy can provide children with rich opportunities to engage in operative, cultural, and critical dimensions of scientific literacy embedded in children's life-worlds. In Chapter 6, Chin-Chin Wong and Kristiina Kumpulainen discuss how to nurture young children's learning of ecological literacy on climate change. The chapter shows how young children's engagement with and learning of eco-literacy, including sustainability-oriented knowledge, skills, and empathy of the natural world, were supported.

Chapter 10 by Alexandra Nordström, Kristiina Kumpulainen and John Potter points out another important and, yet, not so often addressed dimension to approaching children's multiliteracies learning endeavours: the importance of affect. The authors focus on the processes and pedagogical

conditions for the emergence of joy during the course of young children's multiliteracies learning endeavors. The chapter shows how joy is constructed into being by multiliteracies pedagogy that creates spaces for children to create, make, and share different texts and interests in the course of their multimodal, multisensory, and playful activities.

How can multiliteracies be conceptualized, both as a new school subject and/or a way of accounting for children's learning in contemporary society?

Last but not least, this book contributes to the scholarship and practice of multiliteracies in the early years by demonstrating how the field of multiliteracies challenges the relationship between home and school knowledge and indeed the ways that contemporary digital practices might be out of step with how schools define literacy learning. In Chapter 9, Ola Erstad illustrates how multiliteracies are embedded in different activities and places where children participate within and across their life-worlds, and how these multiliteracies practices mediate their transitions and identity formation from kindergarten/pre-school. Drawing on a longitudinal study of children living in a multicultural community in Oslo, this chapter provides a rich account of how multiliteracies as part of children's lives interact between informal and educational formal practices, with implications for children's learning and identity building.

In her Chapter 7, Rebekah Willett considers the changing role of libraries, librarians and their programs in contributing to children's literacy learning opportunities. In her work, she examines the cultural practices around reading and literacy in the US, and considers how theory of multiliteracies might inform these practices. Willett argues that public libraries hold potential to enrich children's literacy learning through multiliteracies approaches whilst creating a boundary space for an expanded view of literacy, and a focus on transformation and remaking. Altogether, the chapter points out the important role of libraries and cultural institutions in and for children's multiliteracies learning lives.

Future research directions

Whilst there are a number of takeaways and lessons that can be learned from this book, its contributions also raise a number of questions for future scholarship and practice on multiliteracies in the early years. We end this chapter by attending to these questions.

At the level of policy, we can ask;

- How does the introduction of multiliteracies in the curriculum affect the politics of literacy, schooling and pedagogy in the early years and beyond?
- How to steer and support productive collaboration between children's homes, early years centers, schools, libraries and cultural institutions in the enhancement of young children's multiliteracies?
- How to create conditions for early years practitioners' professional agency and the development of expertise on multiliteracies and its pedagogy in diverse educational systems?

At the level of pedagogy, we can ask;

- How can multiliteracies pedagogy recalibrate power and combat educational injustice?
- What characterizes multiliteracy pedagogy that is responsive to diverse children's cultural and linguistic diversity?
- How can multiliteracies pedagogy contribute to other major learning requirements of this century, including sustainability and environmental awareness, and tolerance and empathy?

At the level of children, we can ask;

- What difference does the introduction of multiliteracies make for young children's learning and living in contemporary societies across space and time?
- How do young children make sense of multiliteracies practices and what do these mean to them?
- How can young children themselves contribute to and be active participants in the design of multiliteracies pedagogy and its evaluation, including their own learning?

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